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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABU DHABI 01006

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ACTION: AMB
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DISSEMINATION: AMB
CHARGE: PROG

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 001006

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EB/TPP/BTA, NEA, NEA/ARPI, NEA/PI
STATE PASS USTR FOR DOUG BELL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/02/2015
TAGS: [ETRD](#) [EINV](#) [ELAB](#) [ECON](#) [PREL](#) [USTR](#) [NEA](#) [PI](#)
SUBJECT: POINTS FOR A/USTR NOVELLI'S FTA BILATS

REF: ABU DHABI 992

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Michele Sison for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (U) Summary. During your March 7-11th visit to the United Arab Emirates for the first round of Free Trade Agreement negotiations, you will have a number of bilateral meetings with senior UAEG officials. We are providing short bios of your interlocutors and an overview of probable points of discussion during the meetings. End summary.

Bilateral Meetings - Subjects and Sensitivities

12. (C) Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan(MbZ): MBZ, the 43 year old Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, is an articulate, forceful interlocutor. Your meeting with him will be a broad, strategic discussion that will likely move beyond trade issues into a discussion on regional stability. New UAE President Sheikh Khalifa appears to have delegated much of the management of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (the wealthiest of the seven emirates) to MbZ. He is seen as a dynamic leader and a modernizer, and throughout the Emirates there are high expectations for change from his influence in Abu Dhabi and by extension the federation of seven emirates. MbZ is pro-U.S. and has been fully supportive of our effort in Iraq. His visible strengths are his ability to always see the bigger picture and his clear vision for the future. He has a sense of humor, and always likes to get to know his guests on a personal basis. Address him as "Your Highness." MbZ speaks fluent English.

13. (C) Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed al-Nahyan: Sheikh Hamdan -- an articulate spokesman for UAE foreign policies -- has managed the US portfolio since joining the Foreign Ministry in 1986. Sheikh

Hamdan, Chairman of the federal Camel Racing Association, is personally involved in trying to address the problem of the use of underage South Asian boys as camel jockeys, and although he is sensitive to criticism on the issue, it should be raised with him. This is not an easy task given the heavy hitters involved within the ruling families and the large sums of money generated in the camel racing business. During your meeting with Sheikh Hamdan, he will likely raise the issue of Saudi Arabia's stability, and he may bring up the companies and agencies law. Hamdan relishes being consulted by senior U.S. officials and is a close contact of the Embassy. He has a straightforward communication style. He speaks some English, but prefers to use an interpreter. Address him as "Your Highness."

¶4. (C) Minister of Information Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan: Sheikh Abdullah has been a moderating influence on UAE media and has expanded freedom of press in the UAE since taking office in 1997. Abdullah has asked U.S. officials to identify training opportunities for broadcast media. His portfolio includes copyright protection and he has strongly supported IPR protection, urging US officials to bring IPR problems to him. In recent years he has taken a more active role in foreign affairs often attending Arab League summits. Like many Emiratis, he owns a number of private businesses and acts as a sponsor for foreign firms, thus he is sensitive to the agency laws issue. Abdullah is a candid and engaging official, and generally couches his criticism of U.S. policies in the Middle East in terms of "friendly advice." Abdullah is thoughtful and weighs his responses carefully. He is extremely well-read, a news-junkie, very bright, and known for thinking outside the box. Although Sheikh Abdullah's portfolio is the Minister of Information, he has become an increasingly active player in the running of Abu Dhabi, and he is trusted and relied upon by his elder brother, MBZ. Your meeting with Sheikh Abdullah may be combined with the MBZ meeting. He speaks fluent English and is addressed as "Your Highness."

¶5. (C) Minister of Labor Dr. Ali bin Abdullah al-Ka'abi: Upon his appointment in late 2004 as Minister of Labor, Dr. Ali bin Abdullah al-Ka'abi stressed that his priority would be to address the UAE's demographic challenges and organize the labor force so that its nagging problems are resolved.⁸ His key challenge will be to pass and implement new labor laws. He has told us that the UAE is committed to moving forward on developing labor unions, but that the UAE is concerned about balancing its commitment to improving workers' rights with the security and social challenges of having a 98 percent foreign worker population in the private sector. He recognizes that inclusion of expatriates in the new laws is a key issue for the United States, and he emphasized that he was not interested in having Emirati-only labor unions. He has announced the formation of a committee within the Ministry to help manage the labor market, by addressing issues of transparency and clientele service. He has previously worked in Defense Attache Office of UAE Embassy in Washington. Address him as "Your Excellency."

¶6. (C) Dubai Crown Prince Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum (MBR): MBR is dynamic and capable. Although he holds the title of UAE Defense Minister, he has no role in the decisions, staffing, or funding of the UAE Armed Forces. He prefers commercial ventures and is largely responsible for Dubai's economic growth and diversification. At a meeting of the Dubai Economic Council last week, MBR emphasized that all sectors should be ready for trade agreements in order to "benefit from the gains." MBR is well disposed toward the United States -- Dubai hosts nearly 600 U.S. Navy ship visits annually, more than any other port outside the US -- and he believes the U.S. military presence in the Gulf is mutually beneficial, maintaining balance in the region. MBR is a big picture thinker, and your meeting is likely to cover a broad range of subjects, but you should raise labor and camel jockeys with him. MBR has expressed shock at the abuse of underage camel jockeys as documented by HBO, and has pledged to eliminate the problem; his actions have lagged behind the rhetoric, however. (Note: MBR and his elder brother, Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Ruler of Dubai, are both in favor of solving the problem with underage camel jockeys. The third brother, Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum does

not. End note) He speaks fluent English and is addressed as "Your Highness."

17. (C) In title, Minister of Finance Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al Maktoum is the UAE's senior official for economic, fiscal, and trade policy, but he delegates the task of running the Ministry to the Minister of State for Finance and Industrial Affairs (Dr. Khirbash). Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid performs the protocol duties of his ministerial position, such as approving projects, issuing internal documents and public statements, and meeting with foreign officials in the UAE. Although he is disengaged from his federal-level Ministerial portfolio, he actively attends to Dubai's emirate-level municipal and financial affairs such as social services, utilities, infrastructure, and municipal regulations. He has served as the Minister of Finance and Industry since 1973 and has been Deputy Ruler of Dubai since 1995. HbR is one of the principal obstacles to a successful resolution of the camel jockey problem. He reportedly enjoys the sport racing of young camels, which can only support the weight of very young boys. Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid supports increased trade with the United States. He speaks English, although in his October 2004 meeting with USTR Zoellick he used MinState Khirbash as an interpreter. Address him as "Your Highness."

UAE Delegation Leaders

18. (C) The UAE FTA Negotiations will be headed by Minister of State for Financial and Industrial Affairs, Dr. Mohammed Khalfan bin Khirbash and Minister of Economy and Planning Sheikha Lubna Al-Qasimi.

-- Dr. Mohammed Khalfan bin Khirbash serves as de facto Minister of Finance. He is a well-regarded reformer who appears to have the support of both the Abu Dhabi and the Dubai ruling families. His interest in expanding the UAE's trade relations abroad are based on economic, rather than political considerations, and he is regarded by Emiratis as a level-headed businessman and savvy diplomat. Khirbash wields considerable influence in both governmental and business circles. He is particularly adept at refereeing and settling bureaucratic turf battles inherent to the loose, confederal structure of the UAE. He completed a BA at Boston University and a Ph.D. in Economics from Exeter University. Khirbash, who speaks fluent English, is addressed as "Your Excellency."

-- Sheikha Lubna Al-Qasimi is the first female minister. An excellent contact of the U.S. Embassy and Consulate General, Sheikha Lubna is a warm, dynamic and highly intelligent leader who has cultivated close ties with many U.S. officials and business leaders. Sheikha Lubna is a true believer in open economies and free trade. While other UAE interlocutors have expressed concern about the dislocating effects that an FTA might have on Dubai families who rely on mandatory &agency8 relationships with U.S. firms, Lubna has little patience for that view. (Note: that comment was made before she herself became a full-time bureaucrat; she has been noticeably more circumspect since then!) Embassy contacts at the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Economy have both expressed support for her appointment, saying that "she will shake up the place" by reforming a generally backward leaning bureaucracy and pushing forward economic reform. Sheikha Lubna holds a Bachelor of Science degree from California State University at Chico and an Executive MBA from the American University of Sharjah. She appreciates being addressed as "Your Highness."

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